

Introduction and Process

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The Strategic Master Plan was developed in three separate formats and processes over the course of two years. The processes included the findings and observation phase, the vision and recommendation phase, and an implementation phase. Each phase has consisted of data collection along with key findings, recommendations, and strategies. From the beginning of the Strategic Master Plan for Open Space, Parks and Recreation planning process, goal setting has been a critical component to ensure the success of the plan. The intent was to seek much public input into the planning process at the beginning. This will ensure support and advocacy for meeting the public's needs for the future for open space, parks, recreation facilities, and program services. The overall strategy involved in the planning process is to plan for the future and not focus on the past.

The consulting teams worked very closely with the community through two separate Needs Assessment and Open Space Steering Committees, made up of citizens who were interested in open space and the recreation needs of the community. The entire process can be viewed as a consensus-building exercise to address key issues and to create strategies to implement changes in how the department manages itself for the future. Development or redevelopment of new and existing parks, recreation facilities, and programs need to occur to create the preferred future identified by the citizens of Alexandria.

The Strategic Master Plan strategies are written as a direct reflection of findings and observations identified from the research conducted by the consulting teams. This research provided a fresh look at the core services that the city is providing and helps define the areas where the city needs to concentrate future resources in the future. Policies and actions were developed from these strategies to help in the implementation of the Strategic Master Plan. They reflect the immediate activity required of the department to accomplish the desired outcomes and to assert a positive direction towards meeting the community's vision.

The Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities staff, is very proud and committed to achieving a high quality of life for its residents and visitors in Alexandria. This plan will require a tremendous amount of commitment and effort to achieve the vision and goals defined for the residents. The Strategic Master Plan is a reflection of that commitment. The Alexandria Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Department has the talent to be one of the premier park systems in the United States if it can deliver on this plan and move the department forward by implementing the recommendations outlined. This will take political will on the part of elected officials to help the City achieve the goals and recommendations outlined.

To help focus effort and energy in this planning process, a framework for planning was adopted. The three-step strategic and comprehensive planning process included three major components:

- Phase One – Data Collection/Findings and Observations
- Phase Two – Vision and Recommendations
- Phase Three – Implementation

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"Past case studies suggest that open spaces, even good ones, cannot be just designed and forgotten. They need to be evaluated and redesigned over time to address changing user needs. Ongoing evaluation and redesign are critical to the life of any open space."

-Mark Francis

User Needs and Conflicts in Urban

Open Space: An Issue Based Case Study, 2001